

ShadowBound 114

Chapter 114: The Avanclore Family

The two carriages rolled smoothly over the cobblestone streets of Grandeur City, their wheels making a soft rhythmic clatter that blended with the symphony of the city at night. Grandeur was a sight to behold in daylight, but under the velvet cover of night, it transformed into something truly enchanting.

Ornate lanterns lined the streets, their warm, golden light creating a magical interplay of shadow and glow on the polished stone buildings. Each structure was a testament to intricate craftsmanship, with detailed carvings and flourishing balconies adorned with blooming flowers and trailing ivy.

The air was alive with the soft hum of activity. Well-dressed citizens strolled leisurely, their laughter and conversation weaving a harmonious melody with the occasional strains of music drifting from nearby gatherings. It was a city thriving with elegance, its beauty magnified under the starlit sky.

As the carriages moved closer to their destination, the bustling streets gave way to quieter, more exclusive neighborhoods. Here, the homes grew larger and more extravagant, surrounded by high wrought-iron gates and sprawling gardens that seemed to defy nature with their perfection. The air grew heavier, tinged with the faint aroma of exotic blooms and the quiet authority of wealth.

Finally, the carriages came to a halt in front of a colossal mansion that seemed to rise like a monument to luxury. The estate was nothing short of breathtaking. Its towering facade was crafted from polished white marble, gleaming ethereally under the moonlight, and outlined in ornate golden trims that shimmered with a soft glow.

A grand staircase led to a pair of towering double doors, flanked by massive pillars engraved with scenes of mythical legends—dragons in flight, heroes in battle, and gods reigning supreme.

The gardens surrounding the mansion were works of art in their own right. Exotic flowers glowed faintly, their petals shimmering with myst energy, while fountains scattered throughout the grounds sent arcs of crystal-clear water dancing into the air. A gentle mist hung low over the manicured hedges, adding an almost dreamlike quality to the scene. Continue reading on empire

Dylan let out a low whistle as he stepped out of the carriage, his eyes wide with awe. "Now this is how you throw a party. Forget fighting—let me retire here and live my best life."

Sheila stepped down gracefully, her ice-blue gown flowing like water around her. She gave Dylan a wry smile. "I'm sure they'd throw you out before you made it past the garden."

Ariana followed, adjusting her glasses as her emerald dress shimmered in the moonlight. "It's beautiful, but it feels... excessive. Do people really need this much to live?"

Liam was the last to step out, his sharp gaze sweeping over the mansion and its surroundings. He gave a faint nod, taking in every detail. "It's not about living—it's about showing off."

Dylan grinned, nudging him playfully. "Spoken like someone who's secretly impressed."

Before Liam could reply, Mystica emerged from her carriage, stealing the attention of everyone nearby. Her gown seemed to shimmer with its own light, the deep black fabric shifting with subtle hues of purple as she moved.

Against the opulent backdrop of the mansion, she looked like a queen of the night itself. She stretched her arms lazily, her movements radiating both elegance and a careless confidence.

"Well, isn't this quaint?" Mystica said, her tone dripping with amusement. Her eyes sparkled with mischief as she glanced at Liam. "Don't look so tense, Liam. It's a party, not a battle."

"Feels the same to me," Liam replied coolly.

Turning to the group, Mystica gestured toward the grand staircase. "Come along, my dear apprentices. Let's not keep our gracious hosts waiting. And do try not to embarrass yourselves—or me."

Sheila raised an eyebrow. "Who are the hosts, anyway?"

"The Avanclores," Mystica said casually. "One of the oldest and wealthiest noble families in the region. They love these little displays of opulence. Think of it as their way of reminding everyone how important they are."

"Are to mingle with them?" Ariana asked.

"Absolutely," Mystica said with a sly smile. "Consider it part of your education."

With that, she led the group up the grand staircase. As they approached, the massive double doors opened to reveal an interior just as lavish as the exterior.

The entrance hall was a vision of decadence. Gilded chandeliers hung from vaulted ceilings, their crystals scattering light in every direction. The polished marble floors gleamed like mirrors, reflecting the opulence of the room.

Guests in elegant attire milled about, their voices a low murmur of refined conversation. A grand staircase curved upward, its balustrade adorned with golden filigree and fresh flowers.

A butler in a perfectly tailored uniform greeted them with a deep bow. "Welcome to the Avanciare estate. We are honored by your presence. Please, enjoy the festivities."

Dylan leaned toward Liam as they stepped inside. "I feel like I just walked into a fairytale."

Liam's eyes scanned the room, his expression unreadable. "More like a chessboard."

The group had barely taken in the grandeur of the entrance hall when a striking woman began to approach them. She moved with the effortless grace of someone accustomed to commanding attention, a half-filled glass of wine held delicately between her fingers. Her beauty was timeless, her features refined and regal, with a presence that exuded power and poise.

Her gown was a masterpiece of craftsmanship—a deep crimson dress that shimmered like liquid rubies, its intricate patterns catching the golden glow of the chandeliers.

Beside her was a tall man with a distinguished air, his blonde hair and neatly trimmed beard streaked with faint touches of silver. He wore a tailored navy suit accented with gold embroidery, the sharp lines of the outfit emphasizing his broad shoulders and upright posture.

The room seemed to pause for a moment as the couple approached. Mystica stepped forward, her expression softening into one of polite respect—an unusual display for someone so often playful and irreverent. She inclined her head slightly, her voice smooth and refined as she greeted them.

"Mr. and Mrs. Avanclore," Mystica said warmly. "It's a pleasure, as always. Your home is as magnificent as ever."

The woman smiled, her eyes sharp yet welcoming as she glanced over Mystica and then the younger group behind her. "Mystica," she replied, her voice rich and melodic. "It's been far too long. And I see you've brought some... promising company this evening."

Her gaze swept over Liam and his friends, lingering momentarily on each of them as though she were appraising rare treasures. The man beside her, Mr. Avanclore, offered a polite nod, his deep blue eyes carrying the weight of someone who had seen much but revealed little.

"Always a delight to see you, Mystica," he said, his tone warm but measured. "And these must be your protégés."

Mystica gestured toward the group with a slight flourish. "Indeed, they are. Allow me to introduce them. This is Liam, Sheila, Ariana, and Dylan—each of them quite talented in their own right."

Dylan, unable to resist an opportunity, stepped forward and offered an exaggerated bow. "A pleasure to meet you both. I must say, this place is incredible. If I had known, I'd have dressed even better."

Mrs. Avanclore chuckled softly, her laugh like the chime of fine crystal. "I see you've brought one with charm," she said, glancing at Mystica. Her gaze then shifted to Liam, who remained composed and silent, his sharp eyes meeting hers unflinchingly. "And one with... focus. How refreshing."

Before the conversation could continue, a faint, melodic voice called out, drawing their attention to the grand staircase. Three young women descended, their presence captivating in different ways.

The first, a striking beauty in her early twenties, carried herself with a quiet confidence. Her sapphire-blue gown trailed behind her like flowing water, and her dark hair was styled in elegant waves.

She radiated grace, her sharp features softened by an approachable smile. "Ah, our guests," she said as she approached. "Welcome. I'm Catherine, the eldest daughter."

The second young woman was about the same age as Liam and his friends, but her energy was far more vibrant. Her auburn hair was pulled into a loose braid, and she wore a lavender dress adorned with delicate silver accents.

There was a playful glint in her hazel eyes, and she gave the group a friendly wave. "Hi there! I'm Emilia. Don't let all this pomp intimidate you—it's just for show." Her smile was bright and disarming, instantly easing the tension in the air.

The last to join them was a little girl, no older than seven, who peeked out from behind Catherine. Her golden curls framed a cherubic face, and her pale pink dress made her look like a porcelain doll. She clung to her sister's hand, her large blue eyes filled with shy curiosity as she looked at the group. Catherine gently nudged her forward.

"Go on, darling. Say hello," Catherine encouraged softly.

The girl hesitated for a moment before offering a timid smile. "H-Hello," she whispered, her voice barely audible.

"She's Clara, our youngest," Emilia said with a grin, crouching slightly to ruffle the girl's curls. "She's a bit shy, but she'll warm up."

Ariana knelt slightly to meet Clara's eyes, her voice kind. "It's nice to meet you, Clara. That dress is beautiful."

Clara blushed and hid her face against Catherine's side, earning a laugh from Emilia.

Mr. Avanclore placed a hand on his wife's shoulder, his deep voice drawing everyone's attention. "It's rare for us to host guests so promising. I trust this evening will be... enlightening for all involved."

Mrs. Avanclore smiled again, her sharp eyes glinting. "Indeed. Now, let's not linger in the entrance hall all night. The festivities await."

Mystica clapped her hands lightly, her smile returning to its mischievous edge. "You heard the lady—onward, my dear students."

'This is surely going to be a long night.'